

Washington, DC - In an effort to both honor the service of volunteer firefighters and emergency response personnel, as well as to boost the recruitment and retention of these vital first responders, Congressman Maurice Hinchey (D-NY) today introduced the Supporting Emergency Responders Volunteer Efforts (SERVE) Act.

"Small communities in New York and throughout the country rely on volunteer firefighters to respond in emergencies," said Hinchey. "These brave volunteers in many cases serve the same function as professional firefighters, but they do it on their own time and without compensation. The SERVE Act would provide volunteer firefighters and emergency service personnel with a \$1,000 annual tax credit. The brave volunteers who risk their own lives to save the lives of others deserve our support. In short, the SERVE Act says thank you."

If enacted, the SERVE Act, which has bipartisan support, would provide a \$1,000 federal tax credit to individuals who are active members of volunteer fire departments and emergency service crews. To qualify for the refundable tax credit, firefighters and paramedics must serve at least 40 hours over the course of six months of the year. The SERVE Act would promote staffing at these emergency organizations to maintain the proper services needed to protect New York's communities.

Seventy-two percent of all firefighters in the United States are volunteers. According to the Firemen's Association of the State of New York (FASNY), there are 100,000 volunteer firefighters in New York, but departments are having greater trouble with recruiting young people to join the ranks. Many departments are having a particularly hard time filling crews, especially during the day when most people are working. The National Volunteer Fire Council, which has endorsed the SERVE Act, reports that the number of volunteer firefighters in the U.S. has declined by more than 8 percent since 1984. That figure is estimated to be even higher for New York. Major factors contributing to the decline in volunteer firefighters include more rigorous training requirements and the higher cost of living that makes it hard for people to volunteer so much of their time.

Hinchey is a strong supporter of firefighters and emergency service personnel. He supports full funding of the federal Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program and has sponsored numerous workshops across New York to help local fire departments successfully navigate the grant application process.

The SERVE Act is cosponsored by Reps. Nita Lowey (D-NY), Collin C. Peterson (D-MN), Elton Gallegly (R-CA), Richard Hanna (R-NY), David Wu (D-OR), Bob Filner (D-CA) and Raul Grijalva (D-AZ).